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ABSTRACT

Hiring an administrator with those tangible elements listed in a job description does not ensure that the chosen individual will be an effective administrator. Too often the key element of "administrative presence" is missing. An "administratively present" leader is able to conceptualize within his system, interact with the human elements of the system, and actualize his concepts in such a way that the human elements understand and support the actualization. The important opposite of administrative presence is "administrative absenteeism." Three types of administrative absenteeism are commonly observed in educational systems. Physical absenteeism entails the physical absence of the leader from his assigned leadership role. Psychological absenteeism often involves a leader who adheres rigidly to an absolute set of beliefs, and is further manifested by a gap between what the leader believes and what his staff believes. Philosophical absenteeism manifests itself in deep-seated philosophical differences between the leader's belief system and the belief system of some or all of the other individuals composing the educational team. (Author/JG)

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A TAXONOMY OF ADMINISTRATIVE ABSENTEEISM

by John E. Bishop and Guy D. Cutting

An examination of current theories of administration reveals that administration theorists are more and more emphasising the importance of the behavioral aspects of leadership. Indeed, functionally, the theorists may be indicating to the students of administration that the behavioral aspects of administrative leadership are more important than those aspects of leadership that might be considered as cognitive, or technical in nature.

It is entirely possible to build a set of criteria that represents a job description and to label that description with an administrative title. It is also likely that it will not be impossible to find an individual whose characteristics fit the established job description. Yet, we are all aware that finding a person with those tangible elements listed in the job description does not insure that the chosen individual will be able to insure an effective administrative process. To often the keystone of administrative success is missing; the intangible, "administrative presence."

The leader who is "administratively present" is the leader who is able to conceptualize within his system, interact with the other human elements of the system, assimilate and re-conceptualize the system or sub-elements of that system and then actualize the concept in such a way that all of the human elements perceive the actualization as "theirs" or "ours." The important, and too often ignored, opposite of this "administrative presence" is "administrative absenteeism."

Given the behavioral description of administrative presence it follows that those behaviors are necessarily absent, wholly or in part, in the individual who is administratively absent. Characteristically the leader who is absent abandons one or more dimensions of his role and leadership becomes a function of other individuals within the system.

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Absenteeism results in a disparity between the kinds of things the leader assumes are being done and the kinds of things that are actually done because the administrative decisions are made by sub-leaders to whom the assigned leader may or may not have delegated leadership responsibility. Leadership roles are assumed and played by the leader's administrative assistants or by other individuals within the system with the strength, will power or desire to assume leadership roles. When this occurs the products of the system are more likely to be products of the administrative sub-system's beliefs, skills, and frames-of-reference than manifestations of the appointed leader.

Assuming that different forms of absenteeism are involved the next step is one of identifying the type or types of absenteeism most commonly observed in educational systems. It is relatively easy to identify three types because the attributes of each are readily evident. They are: (1) physically absent; (2) psychologically absent; or (3) philosophically absent.

Physical Absenteeism

The easiest type of absenteeism to identify is physical absenteeism; it entails the physical absence of the leader from his assigned leadership role or post. The attributes of this type of absenteeism are the empty chair behind the desk, a vita resplendent with speeches given in distant locations and out-of-state meetings, and a decision making process in which sub-leaders make and facilitate decisions. A sub-type is the administrator who is "there" but isn't present because his door is always closed, he is always in a committee meeting, etc., and the average staff members only contact with him is through a system of memoranda.

Some leaders adopt this mode of leadership to such an extent that other individuals within the system feel more comfortable in the absence of the leader than they do in his presence. These individuals become accustomed to having

the leadership function of the system performed by formal or informal subordinate leaders and the leader's presence brings about a dysfunctional operating situation.

When the appointed leader also maintains leadership roles at levels or in areas outside his institution, the problem becomes intensified. This is particularly true when the institution of which he is chief administrator is touted as a "program leader," a "model" school, etc. This creates a particularly interesting staff problem. As a rule such an institution has a fairly heavy visitor load. A frustrating moment in a staff person's life is when a visitor states, "I understand from Principal Z when I talked to him in (Dallas, Atlantic City, Chicago, San Diego, etc) that you were going to . . ." This is a bit startling when it is the first time the staff member has heard what is being said. A kind of psychological imbalance occurs because now the staff member perceives the possibility that he is not exemplifying what his administrator is advocating outside the confines of his home institution.

The behavior of the staff is much more likely to be influenced by the energies, and imaginations of the leaders who have assumed leadership roles, than by the influence of the absent administrator. When examining such an institution, and its educational practices, it is probably much wiser to ascertain the non-titled leaders of the system and to determine from them just what the real program conceptualization is, how that program is produced, and how it is put into practice.

This leader is very likely unaware of what his staff is doing. Interestingly enough he is not in a position to do anything but observe even if he is unaware. He, under the best of conditions, can only allow his subordinates to direct change in prescribed directions if he is aware of the existing conditions. If this awareness does not exist then it is, as has been pointed out, likely that leadership will fall to individuals who choose to push themselves forward, whether

they are the individuals who may have staff titles indicating leadership positions or they rise from the masses and assume leadership in an administrative vacuum.

Psychological Absenteeism

A second type of absent leader is the one who is "psychologically absent" from his position. This particular state of absentia may or may not accompany the first type, i.e., the physical absence of the leader. In this instance, the leader is most likely to manifest a firm set of beliefs that he feels (knows) are the absolute and only way of making decisions, initiating actions, etc. This leader is further manifested by a disbelief system which exists between what he believes and what his staff believes. This gap is created because the leader is not concerned with the psycho-social needs of subordinates as they work toward the accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives. Rather, he is concerned with the efficiency subordinates demonstrate in meeting the goals he believes to be important, and/or the procedures that he believes should be followed to accomplish the goals. Thus he states what he believes and assumes that all other individuals within the system will understand the theoretics he has proposed. And further, he believes that the staff will be able to implement the theoretical aspects in a fashion that will not only accomplish objectives but will prove them to be extremely valuable, as well.

This assumption and the resulting operational influence, leads to discordant activity within the system in terms of subordinates trying to meet the goals the leader has established and the effect of their feeling driven to understand the theoretic of the system. The discordance will eventually lead to individual coping to maintain a static position and to feelings of incompetence even though someone has given him a model to follow.

A second effect on the staff is that it forces the individual who has a different philosophical position even though he might understand the theoretics,

into a posture that in essence says, "I will not do this because it is philosophically repugnant to me." Thus this psychological absence and the attendent discordant notes that are sounded result in an incompleteness in the system in a very real and practical sense.

It is likely that under such leadership the system or those within the system, will never reach fruitation and indeed may never reach beyond a budding stage of mechanically implementating the leaders theoretics.

Philosophic Absenteeism

The third type of leadership in absentia is a type which manifests itself in philosophic, deep seated differences between the leader's belief system and the belief system of some or all of the individuals composing the rest of the educational team.

This type of leadership may result in some extremely interesting manifestations. It may result in a kind of mental dog fight in which all parties, in the end, become the losers, and in the creation of a system in which leadership does not exist in any real form. There may exist a paper situation but underlying the paper is a ghostly form of activity which lacks the substance of harmony, self-actualization, and effectiveness. Thus the teacher in such a system would be highly dependent upon their principals or themselves for the creation of adequate learning situations. At the college level it is likely to result in individuals or small groups of individuals wandering off in whatever directions they choose without attending to the larger goals of the system in which they are contained.

The end result must inevitably be a situation in which the discordance of the educational community will be felt and will force the situation to one of several directions. First, the community must insert its influence and force its decision upon the educational community in order to resolve the conflict.

Secondly, there may occur a situation which has some very interesting overtones. Let us imagine for a moment a leader who by virture of the powers vested in him by his position has such a strong control of the situation that he is able to force his philosophical position upon all of the individuals below him. They dare not overtly create problems in the form of suggesting alternative paths (systems), even though feasible, because they would deviate from the behavior, the established patterns, of the leader. It is interesting that the practices of these individuals which support the leader will be observable only in the presence of the leader. This tends to reinforce the leader in the sense that he hears and sees what he wants to see and hear. Under such a philosophical discordant system the leader sees and hears what he wants to hear, but it is very likely that the motion taking place is based on an extremely sketchy senario which does not represent reality. The play seen, and the music heard, does not represent the actual scene taking place behind the stage nor the music to which that play is being enacted.

The most likely result of such a discordant situation is likely to be a 'show place' of the administration which is built upon a visual and auditory facade having no grass roots in actuality.